

## **University of Missouri**

### **The U.S.-India Knowledge Initiative and The University of Missouri and the State of Orissa, India**

The University of Missouri (MU) has been involved in India since the late 1950s when Dean John Longwell was one of the university leaders who helped plan United States higher education involvement in the establishment of new Indian universities. MU was the lead institution in the establishment of Orissa University for Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) in 1960 and had 73 faculty there over the next 12 years as the teaching, research and outreach missions of OUAT were established.

When thinking of collaborations with India it is imperative to recognize the huge variability in resources, expertise, wealth and level of education that exists across the incredibly diverse country. The level of economic vitality, development, prosperity and quality of life varies widely across the regions, cities, villages and rural areas of India.

The state of Orissa is one of the two poorest states in India. As a consequence, it has suffered a severe “brain drain” for decades and is mired on an economic treadmill of slow development. This problem has been compounded by inept government officials and ill-advised public policies.

More than 70% of Orissians live in rural areas, and 85% of them depend directly on agriculture. Approximately 50% of Orissa’s population lives in poverty and the literacy rate is near the lowest in India. The infrastructure on rural Orissa is significantly below par, even for eastern India.

Orissa does have some bright spots, one of which is Orissa University for Agriculture and Technology. In spite of woefully inadequate funding for infrastructure and meager operating funds, the faculty is well-educated, industrious and dedicated to improving Orissa’s agriculture and rural life. Students that graduate from OUAT are competitive in the labor force, but many migrate to other states or countries where there are better, higher paying jobs. So, the cycle continues.

Another bright spot is the group of naturalized U.S. citizens, originally from Orissa, who have banded together in a group called ACTION Orissa to help their homeland make the transition to a more prosperous future. They have chosen to focus on education, especially higher education, as a means to their end. They sought out the University of Missouri and asked the university to be a partner with them in their quest because they remembered that MU was the institution that “birthed” OUAT.

The College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at MU is like many U.S. universities and has limited funds to redirect to new international ventures, even with an institution like OUAT where there was a rich collaboration during the 1960s and early 1970s. We do not have a specific USAID or ALO grant at this time. However, a small group of MU faculty with

experience in southern India seek opportunities to collaborate with OUAT colleagues and to make a difference in Orissa where the needs are basic: improved seeds and production practices, better post-harvest technology, reducing restraints to efficient markets, creating new markets and modifying some agricultural policies are examples. We will also explore opportunities for study abroad programs in India, with the focus on Orissa. And, we have significant agribusinesses in our state that are giving us encouragement in both the research and study abroad arenas.

Our experience in Orissa and other south Indian states, and our contacts there, cause us to be optimistic about the positive impact that can be accomplished with science-based research and extension, and some policy changes that will contribute to more efficient markets and transparent governmental actions. These changes can be economically achieved through investment in human capital, improvements in the analytical capacity of decision makers in both the public and private sectors, and investments in selected infrastructure.

One specific we propose is an annual conference that rotates between India and the U.S., to which all interested parties are invited, where critical issues that are central to the Knowledge Initiative are addressed.

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